

Assessing the Role of Poverty and Electoral Vices on Nigeria's 2023 General Elections and the Development of Democracy

Oladapo Tunde OLADIRAN¹ & Adebayo Ola AFOLARANMI²

^{1,2}Department of Politics and International Relations,
Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria

¹dapooladiran19@gmail.com, oladapooladiran6@gmail.com, +2348036086553

²afolaranmi.adebayo@lcu.edu.ng, +2348055159591

dapooladiran19@gmail.com

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Abstract

Poverty is a pervading unpleasant socioeconomic problem that humans and societies dread. Poverty is upsetting in many ways. This paper assesses the link between poverty, electoral vices, and public governance in Nigeria, using the 2023 General elections as a case study. The paper affirms the link between poverty, and electoral vices such as financial inducement at elections and consequently democracy development. This vacuum has led to the emergence of further societal disorder such as widening inequality, apathy, government-people distrust, and deepening marginalisation. The methodology adopted is largely secondary data analysis of published and unpublished materials such as books, journals, government gazettes, and newspapers. John Dollard's Frustration-Aggression Theory as a peace and conflict concept is adopted. This research finds out that the Nigerian state ultimately becomes diminished in quality governance and development, but this is not without remedy as proactive measures can be appropriately adopted by all levels of the government, especially the national. The research recommends governmental effectiveness and transformative living standards using specific and focused government policies in addressing these maladies so as to bring about development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Poverty, democracy, development, electoral vices, public governance, Nigeria's 2023 General Elections*

Introduction

Nigeria is the Africa's largest population, and one of the most naturally-endowed, and influential few politically and economically. It is now widely regarded as – rightly or wrongly - the world's poverty headquarters. Poverty and accompanying electoral vices, particularly violence date back to as far back as pre-independence. These societal vices have long been a potentially dangerous menace. These things are believed to stagnate or halt democracy, public governance, and development. Statistics suggest that 63.1% of Nigerians are living in poverty and an additional 17% are at risk of falling into poverty due to the impacts of climate change. A growing population, weak economic policies, fragile political institutions and a lack of social services have all led to high levels of poverty and vulnerable communal resources.

Nigeria is a country characterized by poverty and systemic inequalities, which have been proven to have an association with electoral violence. This relationship has only recently been explored in earnest, as Nigeria continues to experience recurring cycles of election-related conflicts. Election-related conflicts in Nigeria are recurrent disruptive occurrences with often devastating consequences for participation in the democratic process. This has led to a need to assess the interplay between poverty and electoral violence in Nigeria, as well as potential policy implications for mitigating the effects of poverty on electoral violence in the country.

In order to shed light on the relationship between poverty and electoral violence in Nigeria, a thorough review of literature relevant to the subject was undertaken. Various research efforts have established that there is a direct relationship between poverty and electoral violence in Nigeria. The link between poverty and electoral violence appears to go beyond the lack of resources and the social and political exclusion of marginalized groups. Rather, poor political governance and elite manipulation and patronage of electoral processes in order to remain in power, have been attributed as major factors contributing to the occurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria. It is clear that poverty is an underlying factor and an exacerbating condition for electoral violence in Nigeria, the root cause of violence appears to be largely political and reflects the inability of the Nigerian state to address the issues that perpetuate the cycles of violence.

Most elections in Nigeria have had peculiarly noticeable shortcomings from allegation of rigging to financial inducement to actual violence. References can be made of the 4th Republic 1999 election, the 2011 and 2015 elections, which were marked by widespread incidents of electoral violence, including instances of ballot box snatching, intimidation of voters and electoral security officers, and reports of rigging and vote-buying. In the 2011 elections, at least 400 people were reported killed in election-related violence over the course of the two months leading up to the general election. The 2015 general elections were marred by violence, particularly in the northern region, where hundreds were reported killed and over three thousand people were displaced in the violence that followed. In addition, inter-electoral violence has resulted in lasting ethnic, religious, and political divisions within Nigeria.

Electoral violence takes on many forms, ranging from physical violence such as beatings and shootings, to more subtle forms of intimidation and manipulation, such as voter intimidation, vote-buying, and ballot box stuffing. This violence is often linked to the country's long history of political instability and is seen as a major factor in the country's democratic deficit. Physical violence is the most visible form of electoral violence in Nigeria. During the 2019 general election, for instance, there were multiple reports of armed thugs attacking and intimidating voters in some states. There were also reports of attacks on political opponents, as well as instances of ballot box stuffing and vote-rigging.

Other less visible forms of electoral violence include voter intimidation and vote-buying. During the 2019 election, there were numerous reports of political parties bribing and intimidating voters to try to influence the outcome of the election. Additionally, there have been reports of vote-buying, in which political parties offer money to voters for their votes, in exchange for their votes. Another form of electoral violence in Nigeria is the manipulation of political systems and institutions. This can take the form of gerrymandering or the manipulation of electoral laws to favour a particular political party or candidate. This type of manipulation is often seen in

countries with weak democratic institutions and is seen as a major factor in the country's democratic deficit.

Electoral violence has exacerbated the poverty crisis in Nigeria, with corruption and politicized patronage leading to major protests and unrest. Conflict between different ethnic groups and political factions often erupts during elections, leading to violence that causes property damage, displacement of populations, death, and economic disruption. This cycle has further increased income inequality, perpetuates social exclusion and further exacerbates poverty rates in the country.

Democracy is most likely hampered or diminished by poverty and violent elections. Poor citizens are unable to participate in the electoral process and do not have the resources to engage in civic activities. Corrupt officials and weak legal structures ensure that the electoral process is manipulated to favour certain political factions. This has led to increased levels of disenfranchisement, public disillusionment and a growing mistrust of political institutions.

Ultimately, poverty, electoral violence and the challenge for democratic governance in Nigeria are closely linked. In order to move towards a successful democracy in the country, these interrelated issues must be addressed together. This requires addressing the structural issues that drive these problems, improving access to public services, strengthening public institutions and tackling the corruption that underpins many of these issues. Only through addressing the underlying causes of poverty, electoral violence and lack of democracy can we ensure that Nigeria's path to democratic governance can be achieved.

Not so much has been done about linking poverty as possible or single probable cause of electoral vices. The lack of research concerning the interplay between poverty and electoral violence makes it difficult to formulate policies to address the issue. The combination of poverty, electoral violence, and democratic consolidation poses a great challenge to the government of Nigeria and its people. Although the country has undergone a democratic transition since the early 2000s, poverty, electoral violence, and a weak democratic culture still plague the country. Poverty has limited access to economic resources and to health and educational opportunities, thus weakening social and economic stability in the country. Moreover, this poverty has been associated with increased levels of electoral violence, as seen in recent presidential, parliamentary, and gubernatorial elections. This has contributed to a further deterioration of public confidence in the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes.

The main objective of the study is to assess the impact of poverty in promoting electoral violence in Nigeria and its effect of democratic consolidation using four electoral cycles as focal point, that is, from 1999 to 2019.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is the secondary data analysis. This covers information from textbooks, journals, published and unpublished materials, internet sources and content analysis. The reason for employing the secondary data analysis is the suitability of the means to the research topic and the variables identified in the research work. Also, the source is an indication that there are extant works already done in the chosen line aside the gap the research intends to fill which is clearly stated.

The scope of this study will be centred on an examination of the relationships between poverty, electoral violence, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This study will focus particularly on assessing effects of poverty on development ultimately. It will also explore potential drivers of electoral violence, such as systemic socio-economic and political grievances, underlying political divides, social exclusion, and the role of civil society in mitigating the effects of poverty-based electoral violence.

Furthermore, the study will analyse the impact of poverty on social cohesion and discuss mechanisms for promoting democratic consolidation amid poverty. The study will be conducted in mainly Nigeria, but may also extend to include relevant comparisons from other countries.

Theoretical Framework

The Frustration-Aggression Theory, developed first in 1939, whose major proponent is John Dollard, is adopted for this work. The theory provides explanation for violent behaviour of humans coming from their failure or inability to meet even basic needs. Wherever man perceives or practically witnesses that a situation where their aspirations don't find fulfilment, as a result of badly made, badly-run societal structures, there naturally tendencies is that they fight those things, especially entities frustrating their hopes and aspirations. Feelings of disappointment produces anger against opposing individuals and government or society.

Conceptual Framework

Democracy: Democracy is a system of government in which the power ultimately rests with the people and where the Supreme Power is Subject to Legal bounds. It is characterized by free competition of ideas, freedom of speech, open access to information, government accountability, and the right of citizens to choose their own leaders.

Democratic Consolidation: Democratic Consolidation is the process by which a democracy becomes secure and sustained. It involves creating conditions for a democratic system to persist through any potential ups and downs it may face. This can involve developing and strengthening democratic institutions as well as creating policies to help protect the democratic system from external influence or interruptions.

Electoral Violence: Electoral violence is any form of violent behaviour used to affect the outcome of an election. This includes physical and verbal intimidation, voter suppression, threats or use of force to prevent supporters of particular candidates or political parties from participating in an election, or to prevent certain candidates or political parties from winning an election.

Poverty: Poverty refers to the lack of basic material resources (such as food and shelter) and economic opportunities necessary to sustain and improve one's quality of life. It is generally assessed by income or consumption levels and can also include other standards of living such as access to education or healthcare.

Conceptual Clarification of Development

Development is a subjective and frequently disputed idea (Kolade, 2012). However, there are some specific development benchmarks that can be reached and are generally accepted. For example, it is simple to make the case that every human community aspires to powerful, effective, and dynamic political and economic institutions that anticipate their citizens' needs and provide them rapid, appropriate attention. It's

likewise feasible to claim that any society has minimal standards that all of its members must uphold. Which include having access to functioning healthcare services, having access to clean water, having access to high-quality educational training for all people, and having equal chance in political sphere where competing based on meritocracy is preserved over other factors. These are all ideals that cut through cultural barriers. Therefore, if our perception of development is in fact situational in any way, it may primarily depend on the viewpoints from which it is viewed. This explains why people frequently attempt to separate the components of national development into separate topics. As a result, one often hears of economic, social, political, religious, and cultural development as if it were possible to analyze development properly without incorporating these factors and using a holistic approach. According to Gopinath (2008, p. 91), who contends that the only way to evaluate development is monetarily, a developing state is one where "there is a large potential to enhance the per capita living standard" of its citizens. This is undoubtedly a legacy of the intellectual division that dominated developmental studies in the early 60s and late 1970s, a time when the majority of development frameworks got their theoretical base from mainstream economics. In that idea, economic expansion was seen as a necessary component of development and was largely accepted as the primary goal of the decolonized states of Asia and Africa (Korbi, 2015).

Even in these isolated theories, there is a prevailing view that suggests that a fundamental revolution takes place across time and distance as a result of a steady drip effect. As a result, development is nothing more than a characterization of a certain state where an object's physical development and maturity advance in synchrony. When referring to human societies, development simply denotes a situation, or states that involves improvements in the quality and quantity of life for every member of a given community. We refer to a situation as being in under-development when there is a comparable drop or retrogression in the standard of living for a sizable percentage of an entire population (Rodney, 1972). Development as well as underdevelopment, in essence, denote a relational condition in which one precisely reflects the lack of the other.

Development is conceptualised as qualitative improvement, quantitative growth, and enlargement in the capabilities, powers, and choice of individuals, communities, or institutions (Mirakhor and Askari, 2010). According to Mogilevsky, (2010), development is defined as "the change of the bio-sphere as well as the application of man's financial, non-living and living, resources to meet human wants and similarly enhance lives; quality of life." A common theme running across all views of development is the understanding that raising everyone's standard of living is both development's fundamental aim and its main objective. The focus is very much on skill building and empowering among society's people so they can improve their living circumstances. Dudley Seers, description of development addresses important political and socioeconomic issues and attempts to connect them to human development. Seers (1972) claims that the inquiries to make in regards to a nation's development are such as: What is the current state of poverty? What is the current state of unemployment? What has inequality been up to lately?

Thus, rather than emphasizing economic growth based on abstract data, the emphasis is placed on the individual as a crucial component of society and the subject of any transformation. This study contends that this theory of development offers a superb

analytical foundation from which a proper justification for the connection amongst security and development can be drawn. The three signs that Seers present serve as an instructive foundation for this paper's analysis.

Justification and Significance of the Study

The study on the relationship between poverty, electoral violence, and democratic development in Nigeria is timely and necessary in order to provide democratic culture in public governance in Nigerian. In addition, this study provides an opportunity to evaluate the influence of poverty in exacerbating electoral violence and the resulting implications for democratic consolidation. Understanding the link between poverty, electoral vices and democratic development in Nigeria offers practical knowledge to scholars, policy-makers and practitioners alike. This research will yield useful insights on federal and state programs that are designed to reduce poverty, combat election-related violence, strengthen governance, and promote democratic consolidation.

The study of poverty, electoral violence, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria is of paramount importance to understanding the state of Nigeria's current politics. As Nigeria has struggled to establish a secure democracy in the wake of decades of military dictatorship, poverty has become a pervasive problem, creating an environment in which electoral violence can occur. Understanding the dynamics of poverty, electoral violence, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria is essential in creating more secure and democratic policies and practices in the country.

Through examining the complex interactions between poverty, electoral violence, and democratic consolidation, this study can provide important insights into the challenges and successes of Nigeria's democratic process and inform more effective policies, practices, and strategies for fostering a truly democratic and prosperous future for Nigeria.

Findings

In line with objectives of the paper, analysis of secondary data from multiple sources indicate that poverty is cause of electoral vices. Most of those who participate in violence, vote buying, among others are of low socioeconomic status. But poverty is not the only or major cause. It was found that not only the people on the lower cadre of life gets involved in these vices. However, large scale election rigging in terms of financial inducement is also found among the affluent. They are the ones often inducing using poverty as a weapon of inducement. Nigeria politics in practice is heavily dependent on money, physical cash, and also in the days of the crude cashless policy if the federal government, financial gains by electronic transfer.

Further, expectations of personal financial gains motivates people more than self-fulfilment in career does. Availability of weapons for perpetrating the crimes. Also the nature of job done or even joblessness. Literacy or illiteracy level, or lack of political enlightenment are factors found to be capable of attracting one to electoral vices. Personal, community, and national kinds of development is hampered by these vices. Democratic tenets are impeded, democratic institutions are weakened but audacious individuals are emboldened, leading to societal bullying and insecurity generally.

Conclusion

In the end, the paper makes the case that the problem of electoral vices will persist and continue to afflict the Nigerian state as long as we treat the issue of national security

differently from the issue of national development and do not take proactive steps to address the problems of unemployment, inequality, poverty, as well as social exclusion based on religion and tribe and religion. This holds true for other emerging states dealing with the difficulties of economic development, democratization, and political reform, particularly those in the continent of Africa. Despite being created with the Nigerian state in mind, this framework acknowledged the similarities of the problems the majority of Sub-Saharan African nations confront today. Widespread and systemic poverty, societal injustice and inequality, slow development and economic growth, shoddy democratization efforts, and corrupt and autocratic leadership continue to be some of the most obvious issues for the majority of African nations. As a result, wars, social unrest, and young restlessness have persisted in these areas.

Recommendations

The authors of these paper can, therefore, make the following crucial recommendation after this discussion. Firstly, the challenges of unemployment should be addressed promptly as evidence have shown that a drastic reduction in unemployment rate leads to a geometric reduction in the rate of inequality and poverty. It is safe to say that there is a nexus between unemployment, poverty and inequality as one of enhance the other. Secondly, seeing electoral vices and national development as separate issues is not only counterproductive but also dangerous, especially for emerging states like Nigeria. As a result, decision-makers must recognize the significance of this truth and begin developing the institutions and measures that will effectively assure development, accountability, and justice in their nations. Otherwise, all efforts to combat insecurity will remain fruitless.

The international community cannot afford to ignore problems associated with social fairness, democracy, political reforms, and good governance in developing states. The engagement of the developed states in all domains that promote these issues in the developing states is very vital. These contribute significantly to sustainable development, progress, and peace, by extension, world peace. No one benefits when major world powers, for tactical reasons, choose to ignore flagrant abuses of human rights, poor governance, corruption, social injustice, and inequality among their partners in developing states. Because in the end, it feeds the factors that put the world's peace in peril.

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